

If A Fire Strikes ... Escape Fast!¹

Ohio State University Extension²

Could your family survive a fire? Most of us would answer yes, thinking of fire in the movies. Unfortunately, fire does not live up to these expectations. As thrilling as the idea of crashing into a burning building to save someone may sound, in reality, this would kill you in just minutes. Since heated air rises, temperatures increase about 100°F every foot. So, at six feet up, the temperature would be 600°F. At these temperatures a person can be instantly burned to death. The smoke produced by fire is not like fog as it appears in the movies. You cannot see through the smoke, and the lack of oxygen will swiftly overcome a person. Also, the smoke from a fire can asphyxiate you before you smell it. Don't rely on your nose; rely on well-kept smoke detectors.

Every year about 6,000 people die in fires in their homes. Many home fires start in areas where they may block main exits. For instance, the most likely room in the house for a fire is the kitchen. There were more than 3,000 kitchen fires in Ohio alone in 1989. Frighteningly enough, the bedroom is the third most likely place for fire to start, and most home fires start between eight p.m. and eight a.m.

When fire attacks, your home can become a death trap. Heat rises, and smoke and deadly gases can race ahead of flames, paralyzing a sleeping person.

FIRE ESCAPE PLANNING

Make floor plans with two escape routes per room.

1. Make an outline of the entire floor area. Include furniture positions if desired.
2. Label bedrooms.
3. Locate windows, doors and stairways. For upper floor plans, shade in any rooftop that could be used as a fire escape.
4. Go to each bedroom. Select the best window for an emergency escape.
5. Test the window to see that it works easily, especially in children's rooms. Make sure everyone can fit through the window, and that it is low enough for easy access.
6. Use black arrows on the floor plan to show normal exits through halls or stairways.
7. Use colored arrows to show emergency exits in case these normal escape routes are blocked by fire.

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FIRE ESCAPE INFORMATION

(Post on refrigerator)

Our outside meeting place: _____

_____ notifies Fire Department by phone from

_____ 's house.

Fire Department phone number: _____

Fire Drill Schedule (every six months)

Date 1 _____

Date 2 _____

Date 3 _____

Date 4 _____

Figure 1.

Be sure everyone has at least one, preferably two, escape routes. Escape ladders should be installed on the second floor. Consider rearranging furniture to provide clear passage, or cutting an access door between bedrooms. Parents may want to put children in rooms with easy rooftop escape routes.

A fire is a terrifying experience. Without planning, a person could panic, which might spell family disaster.

Gather your family together for a short drill from time to time. This prevents panic in the few key minutes available to escape. Cover the following points:

- Always sleep with bedroom or hall doors closed. These can keep out fire long enough to allow escape through your emergency route.
- Keep smoke detectors working. Test them monthly by holding a candle close to them.
- Don't waste time getting dressed or gathering valuables. You only have one or two minutes before succumbing to smoke inhalation.
- Test doors before opening. Put the back of your hand against the door. If it is hot, or if smoke is coming through the cracks, don't open it. If the door is cool and seems safe, open it cautiously by bracing your shoulder against it and keeping your head to one side to avoid breathing any sudden smoke. Be ready to slam the door shut if you see smoke or heat rushes in.
- Arrange a meeting place outside. This way missing persons can be determined immediately. Never reenter a burning building. A few breaths of smoke can kill you.
- Never stand up when a fire alarm sounds. Drop to the floor and crawl to your emergency exit. Temperatures above the two-foot level could instantly burn you.
- When everyone is out, notify the fire department from a neighbor's house. Do not call from inside a building that is on fire.

Figure 1 provides a fire escape information form which can be posted on the refrigerator.

MISTAKES COST LIVES: PLAN AHEAD

- Plan your escape routes from each room. Drill periodically.
- Sleep with doors closed. This can help keep fire from spreading.
- Have fully functional smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

- Escape ladders for second floors are vital.

SOURCES

Frank Field, "Could Your Family Survive a Fire?"
Reader's Digest, V 135 (October, 1989), 137-140.

Statistics from B. Chandler, Department of Fire
Prevention, State Fire Marshal.

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